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## Decision-Making for Librarians, Vendors and Publishers

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# Decision-Making For Librarians, Vendors, and Publishers

**As Informed by the Charleston Conference 1991**

by **Janet L. Flowers** Head/Acquisitions, Academic Affairs Library  
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The Charleston Conference brims over with ideas on issues and trends in acquisitions and serials. Charleston 1991 was no exception. Over 350 people attended more than 40 talks.

To synthesize the papers would take pages. This article, therefore, is an attempt to process the data using a particular lens, that of decision-making.

John Smith, in his talk on distribution, used the illustration of the man looking for his keys not where he lost them but near a lamppost because the light was better. John's point was that we need to stop and think about who can solve whose problems. Upon reflection, I realized that the conference illustrates many points in the decision-making process. The illustrations and questions are offered to provoke further thinking.

The paper generalizes from all the meetings I attended and cites supporting examples from comments heard during the conference. No attempt is made to reflect the gist of a particular talk nor to provide precise quotes.

## Steps in Decision-Making

### 1) Decide who should be involved in the decision.

When making any decision, one should think about who is responsible, who should be held accountable (often equal to who handles the money), and who will be affected.

Several speakers admonished us to involve more parties in our decision-making, e.g., in the selection of vendors.

*Question: Who should be involved in vendor selection?*

### 2) Determine what data is required to make the decision, how it will be gathered, and by whom.

Before a rational decision can be made, data or information regarding the issue must be gathered.

Two examples of ways to gather data described at the conference included a survey of surveys and an analysis of vendor reports.

*Question: What data do academic librarians need to make a decision regarding the bidding of their firm order contract?*

### 3) Scan the environment in which the decision is being made to determine feasibility.

The importance of being aware of the environment when making decisions was prevalent throughout the conference. Despite the fact that the majority of members in the audience were from academic libraries, there was enough diversity to remind us that the way we do things is not the only way.

The basic environment for librarians, publishers, and vendors alike is that of rising expectations and shrinking budgets. In addition, we all share the common phenomenon of constant and rapid change.

Reminders of other environmental factor included the differences between union and non-union environments in relating to staff, and the new requirements for businesses to deal with minority and women-owned businesses more regularly.

*Question: How can we learn to envision what the future environment will be like? How can we become more comfortable with ambiguity?*

### 4) Decide what factors should be considered. Give weight to them as persuading or deciding factors.

When making a decision, one must list the factors to be considered and



determine their advantages/disadvantages. Based on this, one can rank the factors in terms of their impact of the final decision.

In looking at the factors, one must consider many angles, including goals, staffing, legal constraints, ethical concerns, practical matters, etc.

*Question: How careful are we to articulate not only the factors affecting our relationships with one another but also the relative weight of those factors?*

### 5) Envision the preferred futures resulting from the success of implementing a decision.

When reaching a goal, one must think ahead to the results of achieving it. A good illustration of this from the conference was the ambivalence of the audience regarding whether electronic publishing is a panacea to some of our current problems or not. When making decisions, one should try to predict the long-term outcomes as well as the short-term ones.

*Question: If all libraries begin to bid their firm orders, what will be the consequence for booksellers? Will it be good or bad?*

### 6) Consider the appropriate roles for various parties to play in the implementation of decisions.

The roles of the various parties (author, publisher, vendor, librarian) in the information chain has been a constant theme of the Charleston Conference. Roles, of course, blur sometimes. All should look to their

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## Foreign Aid

by Pamela Rose (SUNY, Buffalo)

Proposals to support scientists in the former Soviet Union are under review by the current administration. One such plan proposed by Richard Getzinger, Director of International Programs for AAAS "would extend, free of charge, subscriptions to Western journals..." The time required to obtain approval, determine the number of subscriptions and get the program rolling could mean help too late, as the need is critical and immediate.

See — Dickman, Steven. "First Aid for Russian Science." *Science*, February, 1992, p. 793.

## Serial, Serial, Go Away

by L.K. Carr (Boston Univ.)

In 1990, Margaret Hawthorn, serials librarian with the University of Toronto library system, surveyed 223 general academic libraries in the U.S. and Canada to determine the existence and use of policies for serials selection and deselection. The responses were tracked according to type of library: larger research-oriented institutions with more than 5,000 periodicals subscriptions or smaller curriculum-oriented libraries with 1,500-4,999 subscriptions. Questions focused on the serials selection and review processes. In addition to information about the existence of specific policies, the survey sought responses regarding allocations for new serials, the status of those responsible for initiating new subscriptions, the criteria used in the assessment of possible new subscriptions, and the criteria used in reviews of established subscriptions. A copy of the questionnaire is included, as are charts and graphs illustrating the responses to the survey.

See — Hawthorn, Margaret. "Serials Selection and Deselection: A Survey of North American Academic Libraries." *Serials Librarian*, 1991, v.21, no.1, pp. 29-45.

## Legally Speaking

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wish it had been decided on the merits, rather than the lack of "standing" of the plaintiffs and the lack of "ripeness" to their constitutional claim. The chances of enforcement, even wrongful enforcement, against any of the plaintiffs do seem very remote. Whether these chances are remote or not, the severity of the potential consequences may in fact lead to self-censorship of protected erotic material. If that is so, does that render the statute unconstitutional, or even undesirable? Can the legitimate aim of curtailing child pornography be accomplished without casting some chill on borderline material? If not, how do we balance the societal goal of protecting children from exploitation with the constitutional protections of free speech?

I am not sure how we should balance those objectives. The ALA and ABA seem to take the position that no chill on protected speech, no matter how remote, and no matter what the

competing objective, is acceptable. That seems extreme to me. The behavior which the government seeks to control here is the use of "minors" in "sexually explicit" productions. "Sexually explicit" is defined as one or more of the following: 1) sexual intercourse; 2) bestiality; 3) masturbation; 4) sado-masochistic abuse; and 5) lascivious exhibition of genitals or pubic area. I recognize the problems associated with this definition, particularly in the vagueness of the term "lascivious." Further, the seizure provisions of the law are open to abuse, as happened when the FBI raided the San Francisco home of photographer Jack Sturges, seizing both expressive and non-expressive materials.

Yet, pornographic exploitation of children does take place. Is some First Amendment "chill" an acceptable price to pay to prevent such exploitation, and if so, how much? Again, I am not sure. As librarians, publishers and booksellers, we should think about it. I, for one, cannot just follow the lead of the ALA and ABA on this one. ☞

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mission statements as guidance for appropriate activities.

A perhaps disturbing piece of information revealed at the conference was the fact that Rutgers, due to a staffing shortage, is passing the work of bibliographic verification along to their vendor.

**Question:** *Is bibliographic verification an appropriate role for vendors? What are the implications of this blurring of roles?*

**7) Decide who is going to monitor the results of the decision, how frequently and on what basis.**

Once a decision has been made, some mechanism must be devised for evaluating the consequences of the implementation.

**Question:** *How often do we decide to make a change then neglect to test the results? Is that vendor really getting our rush orders as quickly as we expected?*

**8) Be conscious of the need to share the decision.**

Effective decision-making is not complete until all of the parties involved/affected are informed regarding the change. A theme throughout this conference and those past is the need for continual communication among the parties.

**Question:** *Are we sharing our assumptions/decisions with one another in our daily grind the way we espouse this open sharing at the conference?*

The value of questioning assumptions and sharing information/experience are implicit to the Charleston Conference and to an effective decision-making process. If each of us leaves Charleston with a little better understanding of the issues before us and the perspectives of others, and applies this enhanced knowledge in our daily transactions with one another, we improve our abilities to effectively influence the future that lies before us. ☞